

Museums for America Narrative

1. Project Design

The African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa has always embraced, above all, two core values: the preservation and the sharing of Iowa’s African American legacy. Both preserving and sharing this legacy present unique challenges. Until very recently, the collection of African American history in Iowa has been neglected; various projects have included a nod to African American heritage, but there has not been a systematic collection effort until the Museum came into existence twelve years ago. This is due to many factors, including a historically small population (currently African Americans make up 2.3% of Iowa’s population, or 67,596 people); a focus on “great men” among Iowa historians and museums; and the lack of traditional sources, such as journals, letters, and other archival pieces, in public and private collections. The Museum has found that the small African American population in Iowa has a rich and diverse history, has had a tremendous impact on Iowa history, and possesses rich sources, although they remain hidden in attics, scrapbooks, and memories.

Additionally, sharing Iowa’s African American heritage presents a problem. As the only state without statewide educational standards, the Museum’s full-time educator has difficulty creating programs that will work uniformly in the state’s school systems. Additionally, the emphasis placed on diversity education in Iowa schools is directly dependent on the enthusiasm and knowledge of educators, administrators, and school boards. The Museum seeks out partnerships with both formal (school-based) and informal (church groups, NAACP youth groups, and community centers) groups that will teach this history to Iowa youth.

Because of these challenges, the Museum constantly seeks new, exciting ways to engage African Americans in Iowa in collecting and sharing their history. More and more, as the population of the state ages, we hear too late about an incredible member of a community who “it’s just a shame” we didn’t have a chance to speak with about their personal story. The truth is, it is a shame. Even with our best efforts, our staff of six full-time and four part-time employees cannot cover the entire state of Iowa in an effective, efficient manner. Instead, we focus on the people and stories that are most at risk and most important. Unfortunately, many people from whom we should be collecting oral histories, photographs, and artifacts fall through the cracks.

In 2006, the Museum began a project in collaboration with an unlikely group of volunteers to address this need. Eight students of varying ages (K-8th grade), members of Corinthian Baptist Church’s Youth Ministry Program in Des Moines, interviewed and collected artifacts from four prominent African American athletes from Des Moines’ past for an upcoming Museum exhibit. Museum curatorial staff trained the students, provided tape recorders, and conducted mock interviews with the children. The volunteers in the youth ministry program organized the children into teams, and each team selected a subject, conducted research and a pre-interview, and conducted an official oral history session with the subject. In each case, the interviewers acquired objects and photographs for the Museum collection. In one case, three young girls interviewed Dolph Pulliam, a member of the Drake University Final Four Team from 1969, and acquired his uniform, posters, and photographs for the exhibit. The program will end with public presentations by the children and athletes in both Cedar Rapids (at the Museum) and Des Moines (at the church), where the community will be able to hear the voices of the athletes and the perspectives of the children.

The success and enthusiasm created by this project, among the children, the interviewees, the Museum staff, and the members of Corinthian Baptist Church, has been contagious. In discussing this project and the results with other informal education groups around the state of Iowa, the Museum has found a groundswell of ready volunteers who would like to conduct similar projects with the youth in their communities. We have also found a number of scholars and community members who would like to use the results of the projects in their own research and programs. **Therefore, the Museum has designed this project, “Adult Voices, Children’s Eyes—Iowa African American Oral History Project”, to engage children in the collection, preservation, and presentation of their own history, leading them on a path of self-discovery about their own heritage that will take their communities to new levels of understanding about themselves.**

The project will be led by a new staff person funded through the grant. While this person has not yet been identified, the Museum has an excellent record of attracting qualified, energetic people dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Iowa’s African American heritage. The person will be a member of the Museum’s Educational Team, working closely with the staff as a whole and supervised directly by the Director of Statewide Operations, who will also be the Grant Administrator/Project Director for this project. The duties of this person are outlined more fully in the attached job description.

The project goals include the collection and documentation of Iowa’s African American history, with an outcome of at least 240 new oral history interviews (four participating groups per month for twelve months, with an average of five subjects per group); promoting an appreciation and understanding of history among African American children, measured by pre- and post-interviews of participating children regarding the value they place on their heritage, which is projected to increase through their participation in the project; and dissemination of information to the public to increase the Museum’s brand awareness as the primary source of information on African American history in Iowa, as measured by an increase in the number of program participants and usage of the website as a result of the project.

The Museum, through the new staff position, will contact youth groups across Iowa to seek their participation in the project. Already, Corinthian Baptist Church Youth Ministry (Des Moines), Mount Zion Baptist Church Youth Ministry (Cedar Rapids), Young at Art Foundation of Iowa (Fort Dodge), and the NAACP Youth Group (Burlington) have agreed to be program participants if the grant is funded (see attached letters of support—Corinthian has committed verbally to continue participation). We hope this project will solidify these partnerships and create new relationships with additional groups the Museum has worked with in the past. The new staff person will purchase four sets of audio and video recording equipment (digital camcorders and cassette recorders) so that we can run oral history projects with four groups simultaneously. The Museum will also purchase a laptop computer and scanner to accommodate subjects who would like to share photographs and archival documents for the collection, and digital cameras to photograph objects and subjects for the archives. This equipment is vital to the success of the project; few of the groups we will work with have the resources to purchase or rent this equipment. Without the Museum supplying these, the project will not work, and the history we have identified as critical for preservation will be lost.

Once all of the project partners have been secured, the Museum will conduct four sessions, beginning in the winter of 2008 (kicking the project off during Black History Month). Each session will have a general topic, tied to an upcoming exhibit, as a focus. The topics will be segregation in Iowa, African American churches, African American professionals, and civil rights organizations and volunteers. The

new staff person will work with each group to train the children and adult volunteers on how to conduct oral history interviews; scan photographs and handle inquiries regarding object donation; and conduct public presentations regarding the project. The staff person will also train the children on the use of the technological equipment that will be loaned to the groups for the duration of their project, which will last about three weeks. The staff person will then collect the interviews, ensure that all interviews and other materials have been properly documented, and bring them to the Museum. The Museum, using a highly-respected local transcription company, will transcribe the histories and accession the materials into the Museum collection.

Once the histories have been collected, the Museum will then work with each group to create a public presentation of their findings. The children will be the presenters, inviting the subjects to participate as well. The children will present at the Museum (each youth group will receive a complimentary tour of the Museum as a part of the grant) and in their home communities. The research will also be used in the following ways:

- The creation of new exhibits at the Museum, as well as small traveling displays to be mounted on trade-show display units that will be shared with each group for exhibit in their community.
- New classes that will air on the Iowa Communications Network (ICN). The ICN is a statewide fiber optic network that links Iowa’s schools, libraries, and colleges together through interactive, full-motion video; the Museum is one of two museums in the state of Iowa that has its own ICN classroom in its facility. Our education team conducts at least one monthly class session on the ICN, teaching children all over the state about African American history through this technology. These classes are provided at no charge to the schools. The Education Director will use the project to develop course materials for formal educational use, thus allowing children to teach other children about their African American heritage.
- The Museum will develop a web archive on its website, www.blackiowa.org, to facilitate remote access to the materials. The web archive will be a searchable database containing low-resolution audio, video clips, and photographs. Each new addition will launch in conjunction with new exhibits at the Museum on the same topics, broadening the access to exhibit materials and creating interest in visiting the Museum to view the changing exhibits.
- In addition to the website, the Museum will create an oral history listserv on MySpace.com and YouTube.com, formats familiar to children in their daily lives. Children participating in the project will be able to post questions that arise from their discussions to the listserv. A preselected group of oral history subjects will be able to post answers to the questions from their own experience. Each posting will be reviewed by the project coordinator before it is added to the listserv. In this way, we can allow children and subjects who may not live in each other’s communities to interact with each other. These postings will become a part of the overall project and the Museum oral history collection.

As the project unfolds, the Grant Administrator (Director of Statewide Operations), Curator, Education Coordinator, and Events Coordinator will meet monthly with the project coordinator to discuss issues and make sure that the project is progressing as planned. The project coordinator will meet with local volunteers after each project has been completed to assess the conduct of the project and make any adjustments to the process that may be required.

2. Grant Program Goals

“Adult Voices, Children’s Eyes” is an excellent venue for fulfilling the Museums for America goal of “strengthening the ability of the museum to serve its public more effectively by supporting high-priority activities that advance the institution’s mission and strategic goals.” First, the project will provide historical resources that are critical to the Museum’s mission of preserving African American history in Iowa, strengthening our capacity and fulfilling an important responsibility in our strategic plan, accomplishing our basic mission. The project provides an effective vehicle for addressing the challenges of collecting the history noted above and for bridging the distance between Iowa’s African American communities in a cost-effective way. The resources collected through this project will allow the Museum to be more responsive to varying community programming and research needs, and will affirm the Museum as the primary voice of interpretation for African American history in Iowa.

Second, the project will help meet the needs of our potential audiences in new ways. By targeting children as collectors, The Museum anticipates that this project will create a thirst for lifelong learning about heritage and culture among African American children. Through an additional staff member leveraged by volunteer hours, we will provide services to communities that we could not efficiently service in the past. Also, through the Internet, the Iowa Communications Network, and traveling exhibits, we will be able to efficiently deliver our message about the importance of African American history to the entire state of Iowa. The project will expose communities to their history and to the Museum, engaging people who will further appreciate and use the Museum’s services. This project will inspire communities to gather around a common, yet unique, bond. Likely, we will involve African Americans and community members that have never before been a part of a Museum or historical project, an effect we often experience as we provide services to Iowa’s underserved African American community.

In both cases, the project will allow the Museum to fulfill the basic tenets of its existence—preserving and publicizing African American history, and educating the public about its importance and relevance. The project provides an efficient, creative, and long-term means to achieve those critical ends.

3. How the Project Fits Into Strategic Plan and Mission

After a two-year-long process, the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa Board of Directors has adopted a revised mission statement and strategic plan, described in the attachments to this proposal. The mission statement, intended to be a brief statement of our purpose of existence, is: “Our mission is to preserve, publicize and educate the public on the African American heritage and culture of Iowa.” The Board has adopted a core value for the Museum—“Cultural Credibility”. In addition, the Board has stated that the mission will be fulfilled with activities such as “preserving the heritage through collections of objects, archives, and oral accounts and recordings”; “programming...seeking to instill a sense of pride in and appreciation for Iowa’s African American history”; “preparing ... exhibits, classes, lectures,... research projects... and broadcasts via the Iowa Communications Network”; and “building partnerships with other organizations.” In each case, this project operationalizes the Museum’s mission—preserving history through oral accounts; creating a sense of pride in the children who conduct interviews, the oral history subjects who find that their personal stories are, indeed, important, and the public who learn about their past; creating appropriate programming for years to follow the project; and establishing and buttressing relationships with groups who represent important segments of our public. The project also satisfies all three key programming goals under the new outcomes section of the plan: “planning a variety of programs, service activities,

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exhibits and marketing to attract a diverse audience,” “identify ways to enhance collaborative opportunities” and “share information and resources”.

This project will have an incredible long-term effect on the Museum, creating an investment in our institutional capacity to deliver services long after the IMLS funding ends. The accounts, photographs, and artifacts collected through this project will serve as a permanent archive documenting important subjects in Iowa history, which will be used for exhibits, programs, and research projects long after the project ends. New audiences will be tuned to the Museum and its programming, including children, with whom we will have established a permanent relationship that will raise their awareness of the importance of their own activities as history. The Museum will establish funding relationships with individuals through increased membership and marketing in communities that we have not yet been active. And the project will promote the Museum’s brand identity as the authority on African American history in Iowa, which will strengthen our image and message across the state.

4. Strategic Plan: Process and Financial Resources

The African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa opened its current facility in 2003, thus fulfilling its strategic plan at the time. In October 2004, the Board of Directors held a retreat where it began discussing the next step. From that retreat, the Board Planning Committee, in conjunction with the staff, feedback from visitors through surveys, and discussions with donors and members, drafted an initial strategic plan that addressed fiduciary, financial, programming, and communications goals for the organization. Through a series of work sessions of the Board Committee and staff, including both formal and informal needs assessments of the Museum’s target audiences, the group created individual outcomes statements and a scorecard of measurable performance targets, giving each party a benchmark with which to measure the progress made toward achieving those results. The Board adopted the new plan, vision statement, mission statement, and organizational core values, at a regular meeting in 2006, and published the plan later in the year. The plan is being disseminated to members, donors, and partners, so that all key constituents can share in the future of the Museum.

The Museum has taken several steps to insure its financial stability. The African American Heritage Foundation of Iowa, Inc., was created in 2005 to raise and invest funds for an endowment for the Museum. The Foundation established a fund with the Greater Cedar Rapids Foundation to ensure that it will be invested properly and treated as a true endowment. The Museum is investing in a planned giving campaign that will launch in late 2006. Additionally, through an appropriation of the Iowa Legislature, the Museum has created a cash operating reserve to ensure continued operations during slow giving periods. Also, the Museum is creating statewide membership chapters to grow its constituent base, already nearly doubling the size of membership in a year. Lastly, the Museum is pursuing innovative fundraising activities, such as holding its first Iowa African American Women’s Leadership Conference and establishing a women’s giving circle, to attract professionals and others to its donor and member ranks in 2006. All of these efforts ensure the Museum’s financial stability well into the future.

5. Appropriateness of Project for Institution, Audience

The Museum has identified three primary audiences for this project. The first is the children who will serve as interviewers for the project. In discussions with informal educators from across the state, creating an interest among children regarding history and sparking a passion and pride in their heritage presents a huge challenge. Finding a fun, creative project that will accomplish these goals is a major priority for the Museum, and, after the initial test of the project in Des Moines, we know that the project

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will achieve this outcome. A secondary set of children who will receive these benefits are those who participate in the resulting Museum programming. The second audience is the African American community of Iowa. From our experience providing programming to various communities with feedback surveys, holding assessment meetings to plan chapter activities, and interacting with people at community events where the Museum has a presence, we have learned that they have three major concerns: concern that their children do not understand their heritage; concern that Iowa does not appreciate the contributions and history of African Americans in our state; and concern that the record of these contributions will be lost. By exposing children to the past, preserving the information gathered, and making the information available in many accessible formats, the African American community can be assured that we are addressing their needs and concerns. By partnering with African American organizations in the conduct of the project, we will assure that this message is sent to the African American community, and we can engage them in the discussion of their own heritage. The third audience is the general who attend programs, tour exhibits, and use the Museum’s website. This project will greatly enhance the content of these programs, making the quality of our programs better. Also, the community will have access to the project through the online website and exhibits, increasing their ability to understand the entire history of our state.

6. Project Resources: Time and Budget

Timeline: The project will begin with four months of planning activities. Those four months will include posting, interviewing, and hiring for the Oral History Coordinator (OHC) position (Director of Statewide Operations—DOS and Curator—CU); securing the participation of informal education partners for the program (OHC and DOS); creating an oral history training program that is appropriate for children (OHC and Education Coordinator—EC); creating the preliminary infrastructure for the online oral history archive (OHC and Events/Volunteer Coordinator—EVC, who is the Museum’s internal web contact), and purchasing the necessary equipment and supplies for the project (OHC and CU). Then, we will essentially conduct four rounds of oral history interviews. Each round will take four months. We will schedule four groups per month for three months to conduct interviews, giving the OHC enough time to efficiently handle questions as they arise, give training sessions, and conduct pre-interviews with the children. In the last two months of each session, the children will perform public presentations about their findings. On the same day as the presentations, the OHC will conduct the post-interviews, so that we can track our success in making children aware and proud of their history. The DOS will also be involved with the conduct of these interviews and programs as the permanent Museum liaison to statewide organizations.

During the last two months of each cycle, the oral history accounts will be transcribed by a qualified local transcription service, supervised by the CU and OHS. These transcripts and photographs collected, as well as FlashMedia files containing the video and audio clips, will then be added to the web database after the transcriptions are complete, supervised by the OHC and EVC. The transcripts, photographs, artifacts, and original data files will be accessioned into the collection by the CU as a part of routine collection work. The Digital Oral History Listserv on MySpace.com and YouTube.com, monitored by the OHC and EVC, will launch in March of 2007. Traveling exhibits and on-site exhibits based on the collected interviews will be constructed beginning in May 2008. The first on-site exhibit to incorporate the materials will be an exhibit on the non-segregated coal mining town of Buxton. The exhibit will open in July of 2008. Traveling exhibits will begin to circulate in August of 2008. This will also be a part of routine exhibit development supervised by the CU. The EC and OHC will begin developing ICN

curriculum in the late summer of 2008, with the first course launching in the fall. Each course requires at least two months of preparation and promotion time, and a course based off of the findings is planned in each semester of the project. Evaluation meetings between the OHC, DOS, CU, EC, and EVC will take place monthly. For a visual summary, please see the timeline in the Text Responses Document.

Budget: Roughly half of the proposed budget (\$51,420) is allocated to paying salaries and fringe benefits for the people involved in the project. Much of the work that will be done by existing staff will be incorporated into ongoing projects, such as the developing curriculum, managing the website, and processing collections materials. New work being proposed falls mostly to the Oral History Coordinator (new position) and to the Director of Statewide Operations, who will be shifting some work to the OHC and to groups of volunteers. We are proposing buying four complete sets of equipment so that we can run four groups each month concurrently, leaving equipment at each host group for their use and checkout. We are also proposing to purchase supplies up-front for the project so that we do not run into issues involving format changes or upgrades and to maximize bulk buying power. A more detailed discussion of the budget can be found in the Text Responses section.

7. Project Resources: Personnel and Technology

The following are the personnel who will be involved with the project. A resume is attached to the grant for each person, with a job description for the Oral History Coordinator.

Director of Statewide Operations: The Director of Statewide Operations, Joe Nolte, will serve as the Grant Administrator for this project. With over ten years of professional Museum experience in all aspects of Museum management, he is well qualified to manage the project. Additionally, he currently develops relationships with African American groups throughout the state, and will continue to bring those relationships to the table for the project.

Curator: The Curator, Susan Kuecker, has been with the Museum for five years, with considerable experience and training prior to her work with the Museum. Ms. Kuecker will process new items into the collection, coordinate the transcription process, and create exhibits using the materials gleaned from the project. Also, Ms. Kuecker has a degree in early childhood education, so she will be an integral part of the project team working with children.

Education Coordinator: Erin Thomas, Education Coordinator, will work with the Oral History Coordinator to develop training materials for the project. Also, Ms. Thomas is involved with the creation of exhibits, family programming, and curriculum for the ICN coursework. These routine projects will be incorporated into the Oral History Project.

Events/Volunteer Coordinator: Marlene Jessop, Events/Volunteer Coordinator, will work with the Oral History Coordinator to plan events for the project. Also, Ms. Jessop is the Museum’s in-house Webmaster, and will coordinate the on-line aspects of the project with the Web Services Consultant.

Oral History Coordinator: This position will be dedicated to the conduct of the oral history project. The Museum will seek a person with a background in education, with a willingness to travel, and who is an excellent public speaker. The person will need to travel as a large percentage of the job, and familiarity with history and museum work will be a plus. This position will likely attract a number of college teaching graduates who had not yet acquired a teaching position (there are usually a good number of well-qualified new graduates looking for a job similar to this in the area, due to the large number of liberal arts colleges in the area and the Museum’s proximity to the University of Iowa). Great writing skills will also be essential to the position. A detailed job description is attached.

Note the completion of the “Specifications for Projects Involving Digitization” portion of the grant application.

African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa “Adult Voices, Children’s Eyes: Iowa African American Oral History Project”

Activity	November	December	Jan-08	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Jan-09	February	March	April	May	June
Post, Interview and Hire OHC	XXXXXXXXXX																			
Secure Program Partners for Project	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX																		
Create Oral History Training Program	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX																		
Create preliminary infrastructure for web archive		XXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXX																	
Purchase audio/visual equipment and technology		XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX																	
Conduct pre-interviews with participating children			XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXX																
Conduct first round of interviews				XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX														
Conduct first post-interviews with children					XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX													
Conduct public programs with findings					XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX														
Conduct second round of interviews								XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX										
Conduct second post-interviews									XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX									
Conduct second programs with findings										XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX								
Conduct third round of interviews											XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX							
Conduct third post-interviews												XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX						
Conduct third public programs													XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX					
Conduct fourth round of interviews														XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX			
Conduct final post-interviews															XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX		
Conduct final public programs																XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	
Transcribe and post interviews to Web database							XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX			XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX			XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX		XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	
Launch online oral history listserv				XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Create and travel exhibits for the program							XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Create and conduct ICN Classes															XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Evaluation meetings		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX		XXX

BUDGET FORM: Section B, Summary Budget

	\$ IMLS	\$ Cost Share	\$ TOTAL COSTS
1. Salaries and Wages	\$31,666.00	\$16,100.00	\$47,766.00
2. Fringe Benefits	\$1,402.00	\$2,252.00	\$3,654.00
3. Consultant Fees			
4. Travel	\$4,953.70	\$2,910.60	\$7,864.30
5. Supplies and Materials	\$9,680.00	\$7,385.40	\$17,065.40
6. Services	\$24,600.00	\$24,600.00	\$49,200.00
7. Student Support			
8. Other Costs	\$0.00	\$600.00	\$600.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (1-8)	\$72,301.70	\$54,448.00	\$126,749.70
9. Indirect Costs	\$0.00	\$18,787.45	\$18,787.45
TOTAL COSTS (Direct and Indirect)	\$72,301.70	\$73,235.45	\$145,537.15

Project Funding for the Entire Grant Period

1. Grant Funds Requested from IMLS	\$72,301.70
2. Cost Sharing:	
a. Applicant's Contribution	\$73,235.45
b. Kind Contribution	
c. Other Federal Agencies*	
d. TOTAL COST SHARING	\$73,235.45
3. TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING (1+2d)	\$145,537.15
Percentage of total project costs requested from IMLS	49.7 %

*If funding has been requested from another federal agency, indicate the agency's name: